

पुस्तकालय पुस्तकालय
वनस्थली विद्यापीठ

श्रेणी संख्या 923.54 /A71

पुस्तक संख्या A 60.1:-2

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*It matters not if there are hundreds of beings
plunged in the densest ignorance. He whom we
saw yesterday is on earth: His presence is enough
to prove that a day will come when darkness shall
be transformed into light, when Thy reign shall be
indeed established upon earth.*

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It would be only myself who could speak of things in my past giving them their true form and significance.



Neither you nor anyone else knows anything at all of my life; it has not been on the surface for men to see.

Part One

Sri Aurobindo on Himself

The first three sections of this Part are compiled from notes given by Sri Aurobindo during 1943-46 while reading the manuscripts of his biographers submitted to him for correction or verification and approval. The notes were intended either to elucidate their statements by supplying the relevant facts or to correct and modify them wherever necessary.

Brief references to the points in the original uncorrected manuscripts or to incomplete or erroneous statements in them are given in parenthesis in italics preceding Sri Aurobindo's comments on them.

A few marginal notes written by Sri Aurobindo on his biography by a Maharashtrian author are also included here.

The fourth section consists of notes and letters dictated by Sri Aurobindo to correct misleading or fabricated statements concerning him published in some journals and in a book by a French writer.

I. NOTES ON THE PRE-PONDICHERY PERIOD

Section

1. EARLY LIFE IN ENGLAND
2. STATE SERVICE IN BARODA
3. THE LEADER OF INDIAN NATIONALISM
4. CORRECTIONS OF WRONG STATEMENTS IN
THE PRESS

SECTION ONE

EARLY LIFE IN ENGLAND

(European upbringing in childhood.)

AUROBINDO was born on August 15th, 1872, in Calcutta. His father, a man of great ability and strong personality, had been among the first to go to England for his education. He returned entirely anglicised in habits, ideas and ideals,—so strongly that his Aurobindo as a child spoke English and Hindustani only and learned his mother-tongue only after his return from England. He was determined that his children should receive an entirely European upbringing. While in India they were sent for the beginning of their education to an Irish nuns' school in Darjeeling and in 1879, he took his three sons to England and placed them with an English clergyman and his wife with strict instructions that they should not be allowed to make the acquaintance of any Indian or undergo any Indian influence. These instructions were carried

out to the letter and Aurobindo grew up in entire ignorance of India, her people, her religion and her culture.

(Education in England.)

Sri Aurobindo never went to Manchester Grammar School. His two brothers studied there, but he himself was educated privately by Mr. and Mrs. Drewett. Drewett was an accomplished Latin scholar; he did not teach him Greek, but grounded him so well in Latin that the headmaster of St. Paul's school in London took up Aurobindo himself to ground him in Greek and then pushed him rapidly into the higher classes of the school.

Austen Leigh was not Provost at that time; the Provost's name was Prothero.

Aurobindo gave his attention to the classics at Manchester and at Saint Paul's; but even at St. Paul's in the last three years he simply went through his school course and spent most of his spare time in general reading, especially English poetry, literature and fiction, French literature and the history of ancient, mediaeval and modern Europe. He spent some time also over learning Italian, some German and a little Spanish. He spent much time too in writing poetry. The school studies during this

period engaged very little of his time; he was already at ease in them and did not think it necessary to labour over them any longer. All the same he was able to win all the prizes in King's College in one year for Greek and Latin verse, etc.

He did not graduate at Cambridge. He passed high in the First Part of the Tripos (first class); it is on passing this First Part that the degree of B.A. is usually given; but as he had only two years at his disposal, he had to pass it in his second year at Cambridge; and the First Part gives the degree only if it is taken in the third year; if one takes it in the second year one has to appear for the Second Part of the Tripos in the fourth year to qualify for the degree. He might have got the degree if he had made an application for it, but he did not care to do so. A degree in English is valuable only if one wants to take up an academical career.

(Lodgings during school days in London.)

St. Paul's was a day school. The three brothers lived in London for some time with the mother of Mr. Drewett, but she left them after a quarrel between her and Manmohan about religion. The old Mrs. Drewett was fervently Evangelical and she

said she would not live with an atheist as the house might fall down on her. Afterwards Benoybhusan and Aurobindo occupied a room in the South Kensington Liberal Club where Mr. J. S. Cotton, brother of Sir Henry Cotton, for some time Lt. Governor of Bengal, was the secretary and Benoy assisted him in his work. Manmohan went into lodgings. This was the time of the greatest suffering and poverty. Subsequently Aurobindo also went separately into lodgings until he took up residence at Cambridge.

(Failure to appear for the riding test in the I.C.S. Examination.)

Nothing detained him in his room. He felt no call for the I.C.S. and was seeking some way to escape from that bondage. By certain manoeuvres he managed to get himself disqualified for riding without himself rejecting the Service, which his family would not have allowed him to do.

(Classical Studies and the Indian Civil Service.)

Those studies were already finished at that time.

(Two years after the Indian Civil Service examination he graduated from King's College with a First Class in Classical Tripos.)

This happened earlier, not after the Civil Service failure.

(Aurobindo, before he was twenty years old, had mastered Greek and Latin and English and had also acquired sufficient familiarity with continental languages like German, French and Italian.)

This should be corrected as: ".....mastered Greek and Latin, English and French and had also acquired some familiarity with continental languages like German and Italian".

(In England at an early age he took the firm decision of liberating his own nation.)

Not quite that; at this age Aurobindo began first to be interested in Indian politics of which previously he knew nothing. His father began sending *The Bengalee* newspaper with passages marked relating cases of maltreatment of Indians by Englishmen and he wrote in his letters denouncing the British Government in India as a heartless Government. At the age of eleven Aurobindo

had already received strongly the impression that a period of general upheaval and great revolutionary changes was coming in the world and he himself was destined to play a part in it. His attention was now drawn to India and this feeling was soon canalised into the idea of the liberation of his own country. But the "firm decision" took full shape only towards the end of another four years. It had already been made when he went to Cambridge and as a member and for some time secretary of the Indian Majlis at Cambridge he delivered many revolutionary speeches which, as he afterwards learnt, had their part in determining the authorities to exclude him from the Indian Civil Service; the failure in the riding test was only the occasion, for in some other cases an opportunity was given for remedying this defect in India itself.

(Young Aurobindo formed the secret society—"Lotus and Dagger"—while in England.)

This is not correct. The Indian students in London did once meet to form a secret society called romantically the "Lotus and Dagger" in which each member vowed to work for the liberation of India generally and to take some special work in

furtherance of that end. Aurobindo did not form the society but he became a member along with his brothers. But the society was still-born. This happened immediately before the return to India and when he had finally left Cambridge. Indian politics at that time was timid and moderate and this was the first attempt of the kind by Indian students in England. In India itself Aurobindo's maternal grandfather Raj Narayan Bose formed once a secret society—of which Tagore, then a very young man, became a member, and also set up an institution for national and revolutionary propaganda, but this finally came to nothing. Later on there was a revolutionary spirit in Maharashtra and a secret society was started in Western India with a Rajput noble as the head and this had a Council of Five in Bombay with several prominent Maharatta politicians as its members. This society was contacted and joined by Aurobindo somewhere in 1902-3, sometime after he had already started secret revolutionary work in Bengal on his own account. In Bengal he found some very small secret societies recently started and acting separately without any clear direction and tried to unite them with a common programme. The union was never complete and did not last but the movement itself grew and very soon received an enormous extension and

became a formidable factor in the general unrest in Bengal.

(While in London he used to attend the weekly meetings of the Fabian Society.)

Never once.

(Young Aurobindo was sensitive to beauty in man and Nature....He watched with pain the thousand and one instances of man's cruelty to man.)

The feeling was more abhorrence than pain; from early childhood there was a strong hatred and disgust for all kinds of cruelty and oppression, but the term 'pain' would not accurately describe the reaction.

(He may have known a smattering of Bengali till he was five years of age. Thereafter till twenty-one he spoke only English.)

In my father's house only English and Hindustani were spoken. I knew no Bengali.

(In much of Aurobindo's early English verse written between his eighteenth and twentieth years

in England, included in "Songs to Myrtilla", the derivative element is prominent. Not only are names and lineaments and allusions foreign in their garb, but the literary echoes are many and drawn from varied sources.)

Foreign to what? He knew nothing about India or her culture, etc. What these poems express is the education and imaginations and ideas and feelings created by a purely European culture and surroundings—it could not be otherwise. In the same way the poems on Indian subjects and surroundings in the same book express the first reactions to India and Indian culture after the return home and a first acquaintance with these things.

(Like Macaulay's "A Jacobite's Epitaph", Sri Aurobindo's "Hic Jacet" also achieves its severe beauty through sheer economy of words; the theme, the very rhythm and language of the poem, all hark back to Macaulay.)

If so, it must have been an unconscious influence; for after early childhood Macaulay's verse (*The Lays*) ceased to appeal. The *Jacobite's Epitaph* was perhaps not even read twice; it made no impression.

(While in England, among other subjects, he studied Tattvajan also.)

Interrogation mark against the word *Tattvajan*.

(Sir Henry Cotton was much connected with Maharshi Rajnarayan Bose—Sri Aurobindo's maternal grandfather. His son James Cotton was at this time in London. As a result of these favourable circumstances a meeting came about with the Gaekwar of Baroda.)

Cotton was my father's friend—they had made arrangements for my posting in Bengal; but he had nothing to do with my meeting with the Gaekwar. James Cotton was well acquainted with my elder brother, because he was Secretary of the South Kensington Liberal Club where we were living and my brother was his assistant. He took great interest in us. It was he who arranged the meeting.

(For fourteen years young Aurobindo had lived in England divorced from the culture of his own nation and was not happy with himself. He longed to begin all again from the beginning and to try to re-nationalise himself.)

There was no unhappiness for that reason, nor

at that time any deliberate will for re-nationalisation—which came, after reaching India, by natural attraction to Indian culture and ways of life and a temperamental feeling and preference for all that was Indian.

(He was leaving, he wished to leave, and yet there was a touch of regret as well at the thought of leaving England. He felt the flutter of unutterable misgivings and regrets; he achieved escape from them by having recourse to poetic expression.)

There was no such regret in leaving England, no attachment to the past or misgivings for the future. Few friendships were made in England and none very intimate; the mental atmosphere was not found congenial. There was therefore no need for any such escape.

(Aurobindo was going back to India to serve under the Gaekwar of Baroda; he cast one last look at his all but adopted country and uttered his parting words in "Envoi".)

No, the statement was of a transition from one culture to another. There was an attachment to English and European thought and literature, but

not to England as a country; he had no ties there and did not make England his adopted country, as Manmohan did for a time. If there was attachment to a European land as a second country, it was intellectually and emotionally to one not seen or lived in in this life, not England, but France.

(The use of "Acroyd" in his name—A. A. Ghose—in England.)

Sri Aurobindo dropped the "Acroyd" from his name before he left England and never used it again.

(Death of Sri Aurobindo's father due to false report of his son's death.)

There was no question of the two other brothers starting from England. It was only Aurobindo's death that was reported and it was while uttering his name in lamentation that the father died.

(After his father's demise the responsibility of supporting the family devolved on him and he had to take up some appointment soon.)

There was no question of supporting the family at that time. That happened some time after going to India.

SECTION TWO

STATE SERVICE IN BARODA

(Appointments in Baroda State.)

(1)

He was first put in the Land Settlement Department, for a short time in the Stamps Office, then in the Central Revenue Office and in the Secretariat. Afterwards without joining the College and while doing other work he was lecturer in French at the College and finally at his own request was appointed there as Professor of English. All through, the Maharaja used to call him whenever something had to be written which needed careful wording; he also employed him to prepare some of his public speeches and in other work of a literary or educational character. Afterwards Sri Aurobindo became the Vice-Principal of the College and was for some time acting Principal. Most of the personal work

for the Maharaja was done in an unofficial capacity; he was usually invited to breakfast with the Maharaja at the Palace and stayed on to do this work.

(2)

Sri Aurobindo was never appointed to the post of Private Secretary. He was put first in the Settlement Department, not as an officer but to learn the work, then in the Stamps and Revenue departments; he was for some time put to work in the Secretariat for drawing up dispatches, etc. Finally, he oscillated towards the College and entered it at first as part time lecturer in French, afterwards as a regular Professor teaching English and was finally appointed Vice-Principal. Meanwhile, whenever he thought fit, the Maharaja would send for him for writing letters, composing speeches or drawing up documents of various kinds which needed special care in the phrasing of the language. All this was quite informal; there was no appointment as Private Secretary. Once the Maharaja took Sri Aurobindo as Secretary in his Kashmir tour, but there was much friction between them during the tour and the experiment was not repeated.

(The Maharaja's certificate.)

"Diligent, serious, etc."—this valuation of Sri Aurobindo's qualities was not the Maharaja's. He gave him a certificate for ability and intelligence but also for lack of punctuality and regularity. If instead of "diligent and serious" and "a career of meritorious service" it were said that he was brilliant and quick and efficient in work, it would be more accurate. The description, as it is, gives an incorrect picture.

(The authorities objected to his patriotic activities.)

Is the reference to the Baroda authorities?

Sri Aurobindo is not aware that his utterances or writings were ever objected to by them. His articles in the *Indu Prakash* were anonymous, although many people in Bombay knew that he was the writer. Otherwise, except for a few speeches at functions in the Palace itself such as the reception of Dr. S.K. Mullick which had nothing to do with politics, he spoke mainly as Chairman of the Baroda College Union; there was no objection made at any time and he continued to preside over some of these debates until he left Baroda. It was in England while at Cambridge that he made revolutionary

speeches at the meetings of the Indian Majlis which were recorded as a black mark against him by the India Office.

(When he arrived in India, Sri Aurobindo knew no Indian language except a smattering of Bengali which was one of the subjects he had to study for the I.C.S.)

Bengali was not a subject for the competitive examination for the I.C.S. It was after he had passed the competitive examination that Sri Aurobindo as a probationer who had chosen Bengal as his province began to learn Bengali. The course of study provided was a very poor one; his teacher, a retired English Judge from Bengal was not very competent, but what was learnt was more than a few words. Sri Aurobindo for the most part learnt Bengali for himself afterwards in Baroda.

(Study of Bengali in Baroda.)

About the learning of Bengali, it may be said that before engaging the teacher, Sri Aurobindo already knew enough of the language to appreciate the novels of Bankim and the poetry of Madhusudan. He learned enough afterwards to write

himself and to conduct a weekly in Bengali, writing most of the articles himself, but his mastery over the language was not at all the same as over English and he did not venture to make speeches in his mother tongue.

(Sri Aurobindo had regular lessons in Bengali from Dinendra Kumar Roy at Baroda.)

No, there were no regular lessons. Dinendra lived with Sri Aurobindo as a companion and his work was rather to help him to correct and perfect his knowledge of the language and to accustom him to conversation in Bengali than any regular teaching.

Sri Aurobindo was not a pupil of Dinendra Kumar; he had learnt Bengali already by himself and only called in Dinendra to help him in his studies.

(In Baroda, Sri Aurobindo engaged pundits and started mastering both Bengali and Sanskrit.)

A teacher was engaged for Bengali, a young Bengali *litterateur*—none for Sanskrit.

(He studied Hindi also at Baroda.)

Sri Aurobindo never studied Hindi; but his

acquaintance with Sanskrit and other Indian languages made it easy for him to pick up Hindi without any regular study and to understand it when he read Hindi books or newspapers. He did not learn Sanskrit through Bengali, but direct in Sanskrit itself or through English.

(In Baroda after making a comparative study of all literatures, history, etc., he began to realise the importance of the Veda.)

No. Started study of Veda at Pondicherry.

(In 1895 were published, for circulation among friends only, his poems, five of which were written in England and the rest at Baroda.)

It is the other way round; all the poems in the book (*Songs to Myrtilla*) were written in England except five later ones which were written after his return to India.

(It is not unlikely that "Baji Prabhou" and "Vidula"—two of the longer poems that belong to Sri Aurobindo's early period—had been actually written, or at least mentally sketched, during his last years in Baroda.)

No, these poems were conceived and written in Bengal during the time of political activity.

(Sri Aurobindo was preoccupied, even when he was but a conscientious teacher or an accomplished poet...with the problem of service and of sacrifice.... From the very first the idea of personal salvation or of individual felicity was utterly repugnant to him.)

“Utterly repugnant”—this is a little too strong. It was rather that it did not seem anything like a supreme aim or worth being pursued for its own sake; a solitary salvation leaving the world to its fate was felt as almost distasteful.

(While engaged in Baroda State Service Sri Aurobindo began to think incessantly if some opportunity could not be found for service in the larger life of Bengal, of the Indian nation itself.)

He had already in England decided to devote his life to the service of his country and its liberation. He even began soon after coming to India to write on political matters (without giving his name) in the daily press, trying to awaken the nation to the ideas of the future. But those were not well received by the leaders of the time, they succeeded

in preventing further publication and he drew back into silence. But he did not abandon either his ideas or his hope of an effective action.

(The articles in "Indu Prakash".)

The facts about the articles in the *Indu Prakash* were these. They were begun at the instance of K. G. Deshpande, Aurobindo's Cambridge friend who was editor of the paper, but the first two articles made a sensation and frightened Ranade and other Congress leaders. Ranade warned the proprietor of the paper that, if this went on, he would surely be prosecuted for sedition. Accordingly the original plan of the series had to be dropped at the proprietor's instance. Deshpande requested Sri Aurobindo to continue in a modified tone and he reluctantly consented, but felt no farther interest and the articles were published at long intervals and finally dropped of themselves altogether.

(The series of articles he wrote in the "Indu Prakash" were on Indian civilisation, entitled: "New Lamps for Old".)

This title did not refer to Indian civilisation but to Congress politics. It is not used in the sense of the

Aladin story, but was intended to imply the offering of new lights to replace the old and faint reformist lights of the Congress.

(He sent some of his friends, at Baroda and Bombay, to Bengal to prepare for the revolutionary movement.)

It was not any of his friends at Baroda and in Bombay who went to Bengal on his behalf. His first emissary was a young Bengali who had by the help of Sri Aurobindo's friends in the Baroda Army enlisted as trooper in the cavalry regiment in spite of the prohibition by the British Government of the enlistment of any Bengali in any army in India. This man who was exceedingly energetic and capable, formed a first group in Calcutta which grew rapidly (afterwards many branches were established); he also entered into relations with P. Mitter and other revolutionaries already at work in the province. He was joined afterwards by Barin who had in the interval come to Baroda.

(At this time there was at Bombay a secret society headed by a Rajput prince of Udaipur.)

This Rajput leader was not a prince, that is to say, a Ruling Chief but a noble of the Udaipur State

with the title of Thakur. The Thakur was not a member of the Council in Bombay; he stood above it as the leader of the whole movement while the Council helped him to organise Maharashtra and the Mahratta States. He himself worked principally upon the Indian Army of which he had already won over two or three regiments. Sri Aurobindo took a special journey into Central India to meet and speak with Indian sub-officers and men of one of these regiments.

(During his stay at Baroda Sri Aurobindo got into touch with men that counted, groups that counted. He went to Bengal "to see what was the hope of revival, what was the political condition of the people, and whether there was the possibility of a real movement".)

It might be added that he had begun a work that was still nameless; and it was in the course of that work that he went to Bengal "to see what was the hope of revival, etc."

(Since 1900 Sri Aurobindo wished to enter the political fray and to contribute his mite to the forces that were seriously working for India's redemption

and rehabilitation. He held private talks, he corresponded, he put pressure on front-rank leaders; but as yet he could do little.)

This does not give a correct idea. He had already joined with some of the more advanced leaders to organise bodies for political action which would act when the time for action came;¹ it was only in public as yet that he could do little.

(Even his own intrepid province of Bengal was in no mood to be persuaded by him and his gospel of virile nationalism.)

It was anything but intrepid at the time; it was the *mantra* of Bande Mataram and the leap into revolutionary action that changed the people of the province.

¹ The programme of this organisation was at first Swaraj, Swadeshi, Boycott—Swaraj meaning to it complete independence. The word Swaraj was first used by the Bengali-Maratha publicist, Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar, writer of *DesherKatha*, a book compiling all the details of India's economic servitude which had an enormous influence on the young men of Bengal and helped to turn them into revolutionaries. The word was taken up as their ideal by the revolutionary party and popularised by the vernacular paper *Sandhya* edited by Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya; it was caught hold of by Dadabhai Naoroji at the Calcutta Congress as the equivalent of colonial self-government but did not long retain that depreciated value. Sri Aurobindo was the first to use its English equivalent "independence" and reiterate it constantly in the *Bande Mataram* as the one and immediate aim of national politics.

(He found that in Bengal "the prevailing mood was apathy and despair". There was no other go except to bide his time.)

It should be added, "and to continue his political work behind the scenes in silence. The moment for public work had not yet come". (Once his work was started he continued it until circumstances made it possible to join in a public movement.)

(While in Baroda State Service he visited from time to time his grandfather in Bengal. His visits were for political purposes.)

This is not correct. In these visits he was not concerned with politics. It was some years afterwards that he made a journey along with Devabrata Bose, Barin's co-adjutant in the *Yugantar*, partly to visit some of the revolutionary centres already formed, but also to meet leading men in the districts and find out the general attitude of the country and the possibilities of the revolutionary movement. His experience in this journey persuaded him that secret action or preparation by itself was not likely to be effective if there were not also a wide public movement which would create a universal patriotic fervour and popularise the idea of independence

as the ideal and aim of Indian politics. It was this conviction that determined his later action.

(Among the leading lights of the day was P. Mitter who was an out-and-out man of action.)

P. Mitter had a spiritual life and aspiration and a strong religious feeling; he was like Bipin Pal and several other prominent leaders of the new nationalist movement in Bengal, a disciple of the famous Yogi Bejoy Goswami, but he did not bring these things into his politics.

(Sri Aurobindo was influenced by the patriotic fervour of Swami Vivekananda's utterances.)

Sri Aurobindo was not aware of this speech or of any political action by Vivekananda. He had only heard casually of Vivekananda's intense patriotic feelings which inspired Sister Nivedita.

(Allan Hume had founded the Indian National Congress to act as an intermediary for bringing together the elite of the English and the Indian peoples to promote discussions, reforms, etc.)

This description of the Congress as an inter-

mediary, etc., would hardly have been recognised or admitted by the Congress itself at that time. The British Government also would not have recognised it. It regarded the institution with dislike and ignored it as much as possible. Also, Sri Aurobindo was totally opposed to making any approach on behalf of the nation to the British Government; he regarded the Congress policy as a process of futile petition and protest and considered self-help, non-cooperation and organisation of all forces in the nation for revolutionary action as the sole effective policy.

(Sri Aurobindo did not believe in, nor did he like, violent revolution.)

This is incorrect. If Sri Aurobindo had not believed in the efficacy of violent revolution or had disliked it, he would not have joined the secret society whose purpose was to prepare a national insurrection. His historical studies had not taught him the lesson indicated here. On the contrary, he had studied with interest the revolutions and rebellions which led to national liberation, the struggle against the English in mediaeval France and the revolts which liberated America and Italy. He took much of his inspiration from these movements

and their leaders, especially, Jeanne d'Arc and Mazzini. In his public activity he took up non-cooperation and passive resistance as a means in the struggle for independence but not the sole means and as long as he was in Bengal he maintained a secret revolutionary activity as a preparation for open revolt, in case passive resistance proved insufficient for the purpose.

(*Svadeshi, Parnellism and Sinn Fein Movement.*)

Sri Aurobindo's policy in India was not based on Parnellism. It had more resemblance to Sinn Fein but was conceived before the Sinn Fein movement and was therefore not inspired by it.

(*Sri Aurobindo had acquired a measure of intellectual preeminence as a result of his stay in England; but that was not enough, and he was certainly not happy. His deeper perplexities remained; he did not know what exactly he should do to make himself useful to his countrymen or how he should set about doing it. He turned to Yoga so that he might be enabled to clarify his own floating ideas and impulses and also, if possible, perfect the hidden instrument within.*)

There was no unhappiness. "Perplexities" also is too strong. Sri Aurobindo's habit in action was not to devise beforehand and plan but to keep a fixed purpose, watch events, prepare forces and act when he felt it to be the right moment. His first organised work in politics (grouping people who accepted the idea of independence and were prepared to take up an appropriate action) was undertaken at an early age, but took a regular shape in or about 1902; two years later he began his practice of Yoga—not to clarify his ideas, but to find the spiritual strength which would support him and enlighten his way.

(He met Brahmananda on the banks of the Narmada for advice on national education activity.)

Sri Aurobindo saw Brahmananda long before there was any question of national education activities. Brahmananda never gave him any counsel or advice nor was there any conversation between them; Sri Aurobindo went to his monastery only for *darshan* and blessings. Barin had a close connection with Ganganath and his Guru was one of the Sannyasis who surrounded Brahmananda, but the connection with Ganganath was spiritual only.

(On commencing his silent Yoga at Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo presently outgrew the instructions that had been given to him by Lele and his predecessors.)

That was done long before the sojourn in Pondicherry. There were no predecessors. Sri Aurobindo had some connection with a member of the governing body of the Naga Sannyasis who gave him a *mantra* of Kali (or rather a *stotra*) and conducted certain *kriyas* and a Vedic *yajna*, but all this was for political success in his mission and not for Yoga.

(During the Baroda period Sri Aurobindo met, one by one, Sri Hamsa Swarup Swami, Sri Sadguru Brahmananda and Sri Madhavdas....He had even exchanged spiritual pulses with his first gurus.)

He had momentary contacts with Brahmananda, but as a great Yogin, not as a Guru—only *darshan* and blessings. There was no contact with the others.

(Aravinda Babu used to attend the lectures of the Swami—Paramahansa Maharaj Indraswarup—with much interest...personally met him and learnt about asanas and pranayam.)

Only heard his lecture at the Gaekwar's Palace, did not go to see him, did not practise pranayam till long afterwards.

(He met the saint Madhavdas at Malsar on the banks of the Narmada and learnt about Yoga-asanas.)

Visited, probably with Deshpande, one or two places on the banks of the Narmada, but no recollection of Malsar or Madhavdas, certainly no effect of the meeting, if it happened at all.

(Thus it may be said that Aravinda Babu started taking interest in Yoga from 1898-99.)

No. I did not start Yoga till about 1904.

(Such guidance as he received from his earliest gurus and such partial realisation as he was then able to achieve only reinforced his faith in Yoga as the sole cure for his own "rooted sorrow" and for the manifold ills of humanity.)

Interrogation mark against the word "gurus".
There was no resort to Yoga as a cure for sorrow; there was no sorrow to cure. He had always in him

a considerable equanimity in his nature in face of the world and its difficulties, and after some inward depression in his adolescence (not due to any outward circumstances, and not amounting to sorrow or melancholy, for it was only a strain in the temperament), this became fairly settled.

SECTION THREE

THE LEADER OF INDIAN NATIONALISM

A General Note on Sri Aurobindo's Political Life.

There were three sides to Sri Aurobindo's political ideas and activities. First, there was the action with which he started, a secret revolutionary propaganda and organisation of which the central object was the preparation of an armed insurrection. Secondly, there was a public propaganda intended to convert the whole nation to the ideal of independence which was regarded, when he entered into politics, by the vast majority of Indians as unpractical and impossible, an almost insane chimera. It was thought that the British Empire was too powerful and India too weak, effectively disarmed and impotent even to dream of the success of such an endeavour. Thirdly, there was the organisation of the people to carry on a public and united opposition and undermining of the foreign rule through an increasing non-cooperation and passive resistance.

At that time the military organisation of the great

empires and their means of military action were not so overwhelming and apparently irresistible as they now are: the rifle was still the decisive weapon, air power had not yet been developed and the force of artillery was not so devastating as it afterwards became. India was disarmed, but Sri Aurobindo thought that with proper organisation and help from outside this difficulty might be overcome and in so vast a country as India and with the smallness of the regular British armies, even a guerrilla warfare accompanied by general resistance and revolt might be effective. There was also the possibility of a general revolt in the Indian army. At the same time he had studied the temperament and characteristics of the British people and the turn of their political instincts, and he believed that although they would resist any attempt at self-liberation by the Indian people and would at the most only concede very slowly such reforms as would not weaken their imperial control, still they were not of the kind which would be ruthlessly adamant to the end: if they found resistance and revolt becoming general and persistent they would in the end try to arrive at an accommodation to save what they could of their empire or in an extremity prefer to grant independence rather than have it forcefully wrested from their hands.

In some quarters there is the idea that Sri Aurobindo's political standpoint was entirely pacifist, that he was opposed in principle and in practice to all violence and that he denounced terrorism, insurrection, etc., as entirely forbidden by the spirit and letter of the Hindu religion. It is even suggested that he was a forerunner of the gospel of Ahimsa. This is quite incorrect. Sri Aurobindo is neither an impotent moralist nor a weak pacifist.

The rule of confining political action to passive resistance was adopted as the best policy for the National Movement at that stage and not as a part of a gospel of Non-violence or pacific idealism. Peace is a part of the highest ideal, but it must be spiritual or at the very least psychological in its basis; without a change in human nature it cannot come with any finality. If it is attempted on any other basis (moral principle or gospel of Ahimsa or any other), it will fail and even may leave things worse than before. He is in favour of an attempt to put down war by international agreement and international force, what is now contemplated in the "New Order", if that proves possible, but that would not be Ahimsa, it would be a putting down of anarchic force by legal force and even then one cannot be sure that it would be permanent. Within nations this sort of peace has been secured, but

it does not prevent occasional civil wars and revolutions and political outbreaks and repressions, sometimes of a sanguinary character. The same might happen to a similar world-peace. Sri Aurobindo has never concealed his opinion that a nation is entitled to attain its freedom by violence, if it can do so or if there is no other way; whether it should do so or not, depends on what is the best policy, not on ethical considerations. Sri Aurobindo's position and practice in this matter was the same as Tilak's and that of other Nationalist leaders who were by no means Pacifists or worshippers of Ahimsa.

For the first few years in India, Sri Aurobindo abstained from any political activity (except the writing of the articles in the *Indu Prakash*) and studied the conditions in the country so that he might be able to judge more maturely what could be done. Then he made his first move when he sent a young Bengali soldier of the Baroda army, Jatin Banerji, as his lieutenant to Bengal with a programme of preparation and action which he thought might occupy a period of 30 years before fruition could become possible. As a matter of fact it has taken 50 years for the movement of liberation to arrive at fruition and the beginning of complete success. The idea was to establish secretly or, as

far as visible action could be taken, under various pretexts and covers, revolutionary propaganda and recruiting throughout Bengal. This was to be done among the youth of the country while sympathy and support and financial and other assistance were to be obtained from the older men who had advanced views or could be won over to them. Centres were to be established in every town and eventually in every village. Societies of young men were to be established with various ostensible objects, cultural, intellectual or moral and those already existing were to be won over for revolutionary use. Young men were to be trained in activities which might be helpful for ultimate military action, such as riding, physical training, athletics of various kinds, drill and organised movement. As soon as the idea was sown it attained a rapid prosperity; already existing small groups and associations of young men who had not yet the clear idea or any settled programme of revolution began to turn in this direction and a few who had already the revolutionary aim were contacted and soon developed activity on organised lines; the few rapidly became many. Meanwhile Sri Aurobindo had met a member of the Secret Society in Western India, and taken the oath of the Society and had been introduced to the Council in Bombay. His future action was not pursued

under any directions by this Council, but he took up on his own responsibility the task of generalising support for its objects in Bengal where as yet it had no membership or following. He spoke of the Society and its aim to P. Mitter and other leading men of the revolutionary group in Bengal and they took the oath of the Society and agreed to carry out its objects on the lines suggested by Sri Aurobindo. The special cover used by Mitter's group was association for lathi play which had already been popularised to some extent by Sarala Ghosal in Bengal among the young men; but other groups used other ostensible covers. Sri Aurobindo's attempt at a close organisation of the whole movement did not succeed, but the movement itself did not suffer by that, for the general idea was taken up and activity of many separate groups led to a greater and more widespread diffusion of the revolutionary drive and its action. Afterwards there came the partition of Bengal and a general outburst of revolt which favoured the rise of the extremist party and the great nationalist movement. Sri Aurobindo's activities were then turned more and more in this direction and the secret action became a secondary and subordinate element. He took advantage, however, of the Swadeshi movement to popularise the idea of violent

revolt in the future. At Barin's suggestion he agreed to the starting of a paper, *Yugantar*, which was to preach open revolt and the absolute denial of the British rule and include such items as a series of articles containing instructions for guerrilla warfare. Sri Aurobindo himself wrote some of the opening articles in the early numbers and he always exercised a general control; when a member of the sub-editorial staff, Swami Vivekananda's brother, presented himself on his own motion to the police in a search as the editor of the paper and was prosecuted, the *Yugantar* under Sri Aurobindo's orders adopted the policy of refusing to defend itself in a British Court on the ground that it did not recognise the foreign Government and this immensely increased the prestige and influence of the paper. It had as its chief writers and directors three of the ablest younger writers in Bengal, and it at once acquired an immense influence throughout Bengal. It may be noted that the Secret Society did not include terrorism in its programme, but this element grew up in Bengal as a result of the strong repression and the reaction to it in that Province.

The public activity of Sri Aurobindo began with the writing of the articles in the *Indu Prakash*. These seven articles written at the instance of K.G. Deshpande, editor of the paper and Sri Aurobindo's

Cambridge friend, under the caption 'New Lamps for Old' vehemently denounced the then Congress policy of pray, petition and protest and called for a dynamic leadership based upon self-help and fearlessness. But this outspoken and irrefutable criticism was checked by the action of a Moderate leader who frightened the editor and thus prevented any full development of his ideas in the paper; he had to turn aside to generalities such as the necessity of extending the activities of the Congress beyond the circle of the bourgeois or middle class and calling into it the masses. Finally, Sri Aurobindo suspended all public activity of this kind and worked only in secret till 1905, but he contacted Tilak whom he regarded as the one possible leader for a revolutionary party and met him at the Ahmedabad Congress; there Tilak took him out of the pandal and talked to him for an hour in the grounds expressing his contempt for the Reformist movement and explaining his own line of action in Maharashtra.

Sri Aurobindo included in the scope of his revolutionary work one kind of activity which afterwards became an important item in the public programme of the Nationalist party. He encouraged the young men in the centres of work to propagate the Swadeshi idea which at that time was only in its infancy and hardly more than a fad of the few.

One of the ablest men in these revolutionary groups was a Mahratta named Sakharām Ganesh Deuskar who was an able writer in Bengali (his family had been long domiciled in Bengal) and who had written a popular life of Shivaji in Bengali in which he first brought in the name of Swaraj, afterwards adopted by the Nationalists as their word for independence, —Swaraj became one item of the fourfold Nationalist programme. He published a book entitled *Deshar Katha* describing in exhaustive detail the British commercial and industrial exploitation of India. This book had an immense repercussion in Bengal, captured the mind of young Bengal and assisted more than anything else in the preparation of the Swadeshi movement. Sri Aurobindo himself had always considered the shaking off of this economic yoke and the development of Indian trade and industry as a necessary concomitant of the revolutionary endeavour.

As long as he was in the Baroda Service, Sri Aurobindo could not take part publicly in politics. Apart from that, he preferred to remain and act and even to lead from behind the scenes without his name being known in public; it was the Government's action in prosecuting him as editor of the *Bande Mataram* that forced him into public view. And from that time forward he became openly,

what he had been for sometime already, a prominent leader of the Nationalist party, its principal leader in action in Bengal and the organiser there of its policy and strategy. He had decided in his mind the lines on which he wanted the country's action to run: what he planned was very much the same as was developed afterwards in Ireland as the Sinn Fein movement; but Sri Aurobindo did not derive his ideas, as some have represented, from Ireland, for the Irish movement became prominent later and he knew nothing of it till after he had withdrawn to Pondicherry. There was, moreover, a capital difference between India and Ireland which made his work much more difficult; for all its past history had accustomed the Irish people to rebellion against British rule and this history might be even described as a constant struggle for independence intermittent in its action but permanently there in principle; there was nothing of this kind in India. Sri Aurobindo had to establish and generalise the idea of independence in the mind of the Indian people and at the same time to push first a party and then the whole nation into an intense and organised political activity which would lead to the accomplishment of that ideal. His idea was to capture the Congress and to make it an instrument for revolutionary action instead of a centre of a

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timid constitutional agitation which would only talk and pass resolutions and recommendations to the foreign Government; if the Congress could not be captured, then a central revolutionary body would have to be created which could do this work. It was to be a sort of State within the State giving its directions to the people and creating organised bodies and institutions which would be its means of action; there must be an increasing non-cooperation and passive resistance which would render the administration of the country by a foreign Government difficult or finally impossible, a universal unrest which would wear down repression and finally, if need be, an open revolt all over the country. This plan included a boycott of British trade, the substitution of national schools for the Government institutions, the creation of arbitration courts to which the people could resort instead of depending on the ordinary courts of law, the creation of volunteer forces which would be the nucleus of an army of open revolt, and all other action that could make the programme complete. The part Sri Aurobindo took publicly in Indian politics was of brief duration, for he turned aside from it in 1910 and withdrew to Pondicherry; much of his programme lapsed in his absence, but enough had been done to change the whole face of Indian

politics and the whole spirit of the Indian people to make independence its aim and non-cooperation and resistance its method, and even an imperfect application of this policy heightening into sporadic periods of revolt has been sufficient to bring about the victory. The course of subsequent events followed largely the line of Sri Aurobindo's idea. The Congress was finally captured by the Nationalist party, declared independence its aim, organised itself for action, took almost the whole nation minus a majority of the Mohammedans and a minority of the depressed classes into acceptance of its leadership and eventually formed the first national, though not as yet an independent, Government in India and secured from Britain acceptance of independence for India.

At first Sri Aurobindo took part in Congress politics only from behind the scenes, as he had not yet decided to leave the Baroda Service; but he took long leave without pay in which, besides carrying on personally the secret revolutionary work, he attended the Barisal Conference broken up by the police and toured East Bengal along with Bepin Pal and associated himself closely with the forward group in the Congress. It was during this period that he joined Bepin Pal in the editing of the *Bande Mataram*, founded the new political party in

Bengal and attended the Congress session at Calcutta at which the Extremists, though still a minority, succeeded under the leadership of Tilak in imposing part of their political programme on the Congress. The founding of the Bengal National College gave him the opportunity he needed and enabled him to resign his position in the Baroda Service and join the College as its Principal. Subodh Mullick, one of Sri Aurobindo's collaborators in his secret action and afterwards also in Congress politics, in whose house he usually lived when he was in Calcutta, had given a lakh of rupees for this foundation and had stipulated that Sri Aurobindo should be given a post of professor in the College with a salary of Rs. 150; so he was now free to give his whole time to the service of the country. Bepin Pal, who had been long expounding a policy of self-help and non-cooperation in his weekly journal, now started a daily with the name of *Bande Mataram*, but it was likely to be a brief adventure since he began with only Rs. 500 in his pocket and no firm assurance of financial assistance in the future. He asked Sri Aurobindo to join him in this venture to which a ready consent was given, for now Sri Aurobindo saw his opportunity for starting the public propaganda necessary for his revolutionary purpose. He called a meeting of the forward group of young

men in the Congress and they decided then to organise themselves openly as a new political party joining hands with the corresponding group in Maharashtra under the proclaimed leadership of Tilak and to join battle with the Moderate party which was done at the Calcutta session. He also persuaded them to take up the *Bande Mataram* daily as their party organ and a *Bande Mataram* Company was started to finance the paper, whose direction Sri Aurobindo undertook during the absence of Bepin Pal who was sent on a tour in the districts to proclaim the purpose and programme of the new party. The new party was at once successful and the *Bande Mataram* paper began to circulate throughout India. On its staff were not only Bepin Pal and Sri Aurobindo but some other very able writers, Shyam Sundar Chakravarty, Hemendra Prasad Ghose and Bejoy Chatterjee. Shyam Sundar and Bejoy were masters of the English language, each with a style of his own; Shyam Sundar caught up something like Sri Aurobindo's way of writing and later on many took his articles for Sri Aurobindo's. But after a time dissensions arose between Bepin Pal on one side and the other contributors and the directors of the Company because of temperamental incompatibility and differences of political view especially with regard to the secret revolutionary

action with which others sympathised but to which Bepin Pal was opposed. This ended soon in Bepin Pal's separation from the journal. Sri Aurobindo would not have consented to this departure, for he regarded the qualities of Pal as a great asset to the *Bande Mataram*, since Pal, though not a man of action or capable of political leadership, was perhaps the best and most original political thinker in the country, an excellent writer and a magnificent orator: but the separation was effected behind Sri Aurobindo's back when he was convalescing from a dangerous attack of fever. His name was even announced without his consent in *Bande Mataram* as editor but for one day only, as he immediately put a stop to it since he was still formally in the Baroda Service and in no way eager to have his name brought forward in public. Henceforward, however, he controlled the policy of the *Bande Mataram* along with that of the party in Bengal. Bepin Pal had stated the aim of the new party as complete self-government free from British control; but this could have meant or at least included the Moderate aim of colonial self-government and Dadabhai Naoroji as President of the Calcutta session of the Congress had actually tried to capture the name of Swaraj, the Extremists' term for independence, for this colonial self-government. Sri Aurobindo's

first preoccupation was to declare openly for complete and absolute independence as the aim of political action in India and to insist on this persistently in the pages of the journal; he was the first politician in India who had the courage to do this in public and he was immediately successful. The party took up the word Swaraj to express its own ideal of independence and it soon spread everywhere; but it was taken up as the ideal of the Congress much later on at the Karachi session of that body when it had been reconstituted and renovated under Nationalist leadership. The journal declared and developed a new political programme for the country as the programme of the Nationalist party, non-cooperation, passive resistance, Swadeshi, Boycott, national education, settlement of disputes in law by popular arbitration and other items of Sri Aurobindo's plan. Sri Aurobindo published in the paper a series of articles on passive resistance, another developing a political philosophy of revolution and wrote many leaders aimed at destroying the shibboleths and superstitions of the Moderate Party, such as the belief in British justice and benefits bestowed by foreign government in India, faith in British law courts and in the adequacy of the education given in schools and universities in India and stressed more strongly and persistently than had

been done the emasculation, stagnation or slow progress, poverty, economic dependence, absence of a rich industrial activity and all other evil results of a foreign government; he insisted especially that even if an alien rule were benevolent and beneficent, that could not be a substitute for a free and healthy national life. Assisted by this publicity the ideas of the Nationalists gained ground everywhere, especially in the Punjab which had before been predominantly Moderate. The *Bande Mataram* was almost unique in journalistic history in the influence it exercised in converting the mind of a people and preparing it for revolution. But its weakness was on the financial side; for the Extremists were still a poor man's party. So long as Sri Aurobindo was there in active control, he managed with great difficulty to secure sufficient public support for running the paper, but not for expanding it as he wanted, and when he was arrested and held in jail for a year, the economic situation of *Bande Mataram* became desperate: finally, it was decided that the journal should die a glorious death rather than perish by starvation and Bejoy Chatterji was commissioned to write an article for which the Government would certainly stop the publication of the paper. Sri Aurobindo had always taken care to give no handle in the editorial articles of the *Bande*

Mataram either for a prosecution for sedition or any other drastic action fatal to its existence; an editor of *The Statesman* complained that the paper reeked with sedition patently visible between every line, but it was so skilfully written that no legal action could be taken. The manœuvre succeeded and the life of the *Bande Mataram* came to an end in Sri Aurobindo's absence.

The Nationalist programme could only achieve a partial beginning before it was temporarily broken by severe government repression. Its most important practical item was Swadeshi plus Boycott; for Swadeshi much was done to make the idea general and a few beginnings were made, but the greater results showed themselves only afterwards in the course of time. Sri Aurobindo was anxious that this part of the movement should be not only propagated in idea but given a practical organisation and an effective force. He wrote from Baroda asking whether it would not be possible to bring in the industrialists and manufacturers and gain the financial support of landed magnates and create an organisation in which men of industrial and commercial ability and experience and not politicians alone could direct operations and devise means of carrying out the policy; but he was told that it was impossible, the industrialists and the landed magnates were too

timid to join in the movement, and the big commercial men were all interested in the import of British goods and therefore on the side of the status quo: so he had to abandon his idea of the organisation of Swadeshi and Boycott. Both Tilak and Sri Aurobindo were in favour of an effective boycott of British goods—but of British goods only; for there was little in the country to replace foreign articles: so they recommended the substitution for the British of foreign goods from Germany and Austria and America so that the fullest pressure might be brought upon England. They wanted the Boycott to be a political weapon and not merely an aid to Swadeshi; the total boycott of all foreign goods was an impracticable idea and the very limited application of it recommended in Congress resolutions was too small to be politically effective. They were for national self-sufficiency in key industries, the production of necessities and of all manufactures of which India had the natural means, but complete self-sufficiency or autarchy did not seem practicable or even desirable since a free India would need to export goods as well as supply them for internal consumption and for that she must import as well and maintain an international exchange. But the sudden enthusiasm for the boycott of all foreign goods was wide and sweeping and the leaders had

to conform to this popular cry and be content with the impulse it gave to the Swadeshi idea. National education was another item to which Sri Aurobindo attached much importance. He had been disgusted with the education given by the British system in the schools and colleges and universities, a system of which as a professor in the Baroda College he had full experience. He felt that it tended to dull and impoverish and tie up the naturally quick and brilliant and supple Indian intelligence, to teach it bad intellectual habits and spoil by narrow information and mechanical instruction its originality and productivity. The movement began well and many national schools were established in Bengal and many able men became teachers, but still the development was insufficient and the economic position of the schools precarious. Sri Aurobindo had decided to take up the movement personally and see whether it could not be given a greater expansion and a stronger foundation, but his departure from Bengal cut short this plan. In the repression and the general depression caused by it, most of the schools failed to survive. The idea lived on and it may be hoped that it will one day find an adequate form and body. The idea of people's courts was taken up and worked in some districts, not without success, but this too perished in the storm. The

idea of volunteer groupings had a stronger vitality; it lived on, took shape, multiplied its formations and its workers were the spearhead of the movement of direct action which broke out from time to time in the struggle for freedom. The purely political elements of the Nationalist programme and activities were those which lasted and after each wave of repression and depression renewed the thread of the life of the movement for liberation and kept it recognisably one throughout nearly fifty years of its struggle. But the greatest thing done in those years was the creation of a new spirit in the country. In the enthusiasm that swept surging everywhere with the cry of *Bande Mataram* ringing on all sides men felt it glorious to be alive and dare and act together and hope; the old apathy and timidity was broken and a force created which nothing could destroy and which rose again and again in wave after wave till it carried India to the beginning of a complete victory.

After the *Bande Mataram* case, Sri Aurobindo became the recognised leader of Nationalism in Bengal. He led the party at the session of the Bengal Provincial Conference at Midnapore where there was a vehement clash between the two parties. He now for the first time became a speaker on the public platform, addressed large meetings at Surat

and presided over the Nationalist conference there. He stopped at several places on his way back to Calcutta and was the speaker at large meetings called to hear him. He led the party again at the session of the Provincial Conference at Hoogly. There it became evident for the first time that Nationalism was gaining the ascendant, for it commanded a majority among the delegates and in the Subjects Committee Sri Aurobindo was able to defeat the Moderates' resolution welcoming the Reforms and pass his own resolution stigmatising them as utterly inadequate and unreal and rejecting them. But the Moderate leaders threatened to secede if this was maintained and to avoid a scission he consented to allow the Moderate resolution to pass, but spoke at the public session explaining his decision and asking the Nationalists to acquiesce in it in spite of their victory so as to keep some unity in the political forces of Bengal. The Nationalist delegates, at first triumphant and clamorous, accepted the decision and left the hall quietly at Sri Aurobindo's order so that they might not have to vote either for or against the Moderate resolution. This caused much amazement and discomfiture in the minds of the Moderate leaders who complained that the people had refused to listen to their old and tried leaders and clamoured against them, but at the

bidding of a young man new to politics they had obeyed in disciplined silence as if a single body.

About this period Sri Aurobindo had decided to take up charge of a Bengali daily, *Nava Shakti*, and had moved from his rented house in Scotts Lane, where he had been living with his wife and sister, to rooms in the office of this newspaper, and there, before he could begin this new venture, early one morning while he was still sleeping, the police charged up the stairs, revolver in hand, and arrested him. He was taken to the police station and thence to Alipore Jail where he remained for a year during the magistrate's investigation and the trial in the Sessions Court at Alipore. At first he was lodged for some time in a solitary cell but afterwards transferred to a large section of the jail where he lived in one huge room with the other prisoners in the case; subsequently, after the assassination of the approver in the jail, all the prisoners were confined in contiguous but separate cells and met only in the court or in the daily exercise where they could not speak to each other. It was in the second period that Sri Aurobindo made the acquaintance of most of his fellow accused. In the jail he spent almost all his time in reading the Gita and the Upanishads and in intensive meditation and the practice of Yoga. This he pursued even in the second interval

when he had no opportunity of being alone and had to accustom himself to meditation amid general talk and laughter, the playing of games and much noise and disturbance; in the first and third periods he had full opportunity and used it to the full. In the Sessions Court the accused were confined in a large prisoner's cage and here during the whole day he remained absorbed in his meditation, attending little to the trial and hardly listening to the evidence. C. R. Das, one of his Nationalist collaborators and a famous lawyer, had put aside his large practice and devoted himself for months to the defence of Sri Aurobindo, who left the case entirely to him and troubled no more about it; for he had been assured from within and knew that he would be acquitted. During this period his view of life was radically changed; he had taken up Yoga with the original idea of acquiring spiritual force and energy and divine guidance for his work in life. But now the inner spiritual life and realisation which had continually been increasing in magnitude and universality and assuming a larger place took him up entirely and his work became a part and result of it and besides far exceeded the service and liberation of the country and fixed itself in an aim, previously only glimpsed, which was world-wide in its

bearing and concerned with the whole future of humanity.

When he came out from jail Sri Aurobindo found the whole political aspect of the country altered; most of the Nationalist leaders were in jail or in self-imposed exile and there was a general discouragement and depression, though the feeling in the country had not ceased but was only suppressed and was growing by its suppression. He determined to continue the struggle; he held weekly meetings in Calcutta, but the attendance which had numbered formerly thousands full of enthusiasm, was now only of hundreds and had no longer the same force and life. He also went to places in the districts to speak and at one of these delivered his speech at Uttarpara in which for the first time he spoke publicly of his Yoga and his spiritual experiences. He started also two weeklies, one in English and one in Bengali, the *Karmayogin* and *Dharma* which had a fairly large circulation and were, unlike the *Bande Mataram*, easily self-supporting. He attended and spoke at the Provincial Conference at Barisal in 1909: for in Bengal owing to the compromise at Hoogly the two parties had not split altogether apart and both joined in the Conference though there could be no representative of the Nationalist Party at the meeting of the Central Moderate Body

which had taken the place of the Congress. Surendra Nath Banerji had indeed called a private conference attended by Sri Aurobindo and one or two other leaders of the Nationalists to discuss a project of uniting the two parties at the session in Benares and giving a joint fight to the dominant right wing of the Moderates; for he had always dreamt of becoming again the leader of a united Bengal with the Extremist Party as his strong right arm: but that would have necessitated the Nationalists being appointed as delegates by the Bengal Moderates and accepting the constitution imposed at Surat. This Sri Aurobindo refused to do; he demanded a change in that constitution enabling newly formed associations to elect delegates so that the Nationalists might independently send their representatives to the All-India session and on this point the negotiations broke down. Sri Aurobindo began, however, to consider how to revive the national movement under the changed circumstances. He glanced at the possibility of falling back on a Home Rule movement which the Government could not repress; but this, which was actually realised by Mrs. Besant later on, would have meant a postponement and a falling back from the ideal of independence. He looked also at the possibility of an intense and organised passive

resistance movement in the manner afterwards adopted by Gandhi. He saw, however, that he himself could not be the leader of such a movement.

At no time did he consent to have anything to do with the sham Reforms which were all the Government at that period cared to offer. He held up always the slogan of 'no compromise' or, as he now put it in his Open Letter to his countrymen published in the *Karmayogin*, 'no co-operation without control.' It was only if real political, administrative and financial control were given to popular ministers in an elected Assembly that he would have anything to do with offers from the British Government. Of this he saw no sign until the proposal of the Montagu Reforms in which first something of the kind seemed to appear. He foresaw that the British Government would have to begin trying to meet the national aspiration half-way, but he would not anticipate that moment before it actually came. The Montagu Reforms came nine years after Sri Aurobindo had retired to Pondicherry and by that time he had abandoned all outward and public political activity in order to devote himself to his spiritual work, acting only by his spiritual force on the movement in India, until his prevision of real negotiations between the British Government

and the Indian leaders was fulfilled by the Cripps' proposal and the events that came after.

Meanwhile the Government were determined to get rid of Sri Aurobindo as the only considerable obstacle left to the success of their repressive policy. As they could not send him to the Andamans they decided to deport him. This came to the knowledge of Sister Nivedita and she informed Sri Aurobindo and asked him to leave British India and work from outside so that his work would not be stopped or totally interrupted. Sri Aurobindo contented himself with publishing in the *Karmayogin* a signed article in which he spoke of the project of deportation and left the country what he called his last will and testament; he felt sure that this would kill the idea of deportation and in fact it so turned out. Deportation left aside, the Government could only wait for some opportunity for prosecution for sedition and this chance came to them when Sri Aurobindo published in the same paper another signed article reviewing the political situation. The article was sufficiently moderate in its tone and later on the High Court refused to regard it as seditious and acquitted the printer. Sri Aurobindo one night at the *Karmayogin* office received information of the Government's intention to search the office and arrest him. While considering what

should be his attitude, he received a sudden command from above to go to Chandernagore in French India. He obeyed the command at once, for it was now his rule to move only as he was moved by the divine guidance and never to resist and depart from it; he did not stay to consult with anyone, but in ten minutes was at the river *ghat* and in a boat plying on the Ganges; in a few hours he was at Chandernagore where he went into secret residence. He sent a message to Sister Nivedita asking her to take up the editing of the *Karmayogin* in his absence. This was the end of his active connection with his two journals. At Chandernagore he plunged entirely into solitary meditation and ceased all other activity. Then there came to him a call to proceed to Pondicherry. A boat manned by some young revolutionaries of Uttarpara took him to Calcutta; there he boarded the *Dupleix* and reached Pondicherry on April 4, 1910.

At Pondicherry, from this time onwards Sri Aurobindo's practice of Yoga became more and more absorbing. He dropped all participation in any public political activity, refused more than one request to preside at sessions of the restored Indian National Congress and made a rule of abstention from any public utterance of any kind not connected with his spiritual activities or any contri-

bution of writings or articles except what he wrote afterwards in the *Arya*. For some years he kept up some private communication with the revolutionary forces he had led, through one or two individuals, but this also he dropped after a time and his abstention from any kind of participation in politics became complete. As his vision of the future grew clearer, he saw that the eventual independence of India was assured by the march of forces of which he became aware, that Britain would be compelled by the pressure of Indian resistance and by the pressure of international events to concede independence and that she was already moving towards that eventuality with whatever opposition and reluctance. He felt that there would be no need of armed insurrection and that the secret preparation for it could be dropped without injury to the nationalist cause, although the revolutionary spirit had to be maintained and would be maintained intact. His own personal intervention in politics would therefore be no longer indispensable. Apart from all this, the magnitude of the spiritual work set before him became more and more clear to him, and he saw that the concentration of all his energies on it was necessary. Accordingly, when the Ashram came into existence, he kept it free from all political connections or action; even when

he intervened in politics twice afterwards on special occasions, this intervention was purely personal and the Ashram was not concerned in it. The British Government and numbers of people besides could not believe that Sri Aurobindo had ceased from all political action and it was supposed by them that he was secretly participating in revolutionary activities and even creating a secret organisation in the security of French India. But all this was pure imagination and rumour and there was nothing of the kind. His retirement from political activity was complete, just as was his personal retirement into solitude in 1910.

But this did not mean, as most people supposed, that he had retired into some height of spiritual experience devoid of any further interest in the world or in the fate of India. It could not mean that, for the very principle of his Yoga was not only to realise the Divine and attain to a complete spiritual consciousness, but also to take all life and all world activity into the scope of this spiritual consciousness and action and to base life on the Spirit and give it a spiritual meaning. In his retirement Sri Aurobindo kept a close watch on all that was happening in the world and in India and actively intervened whenever necessary, but solely with a spiritual force and silent spiritual action; for

it is part of the experience of those who have advanced far in Yoga that besides the ordinary forces and activities of the mind and life and body in Matter, there are other forces and powers that can act and do act from behind and from above; there is also a spiritual dynamic power which can be possessed by those who are advanced in the spiritual consciousness, though all do not care to possess or, possessing, to use it, and this power is greater than any other and more effective. It was this force which, as soon as he had attained to it, he used, at first only in a limited field of personal work, but afterwards in a constant action upon the world forces. He had no reason to be dissatisfied with the results or to feel the necessity of any other kind of action. Twice, however, he found it advisable to take in addition other action of a public kind. The first was in relation to the second World War. At the beginning he did not actively concern himself with it, but when it appeared as if Hitler would crush all the forces opposed to him and Nazism dominate the world, he began to intervene. He declared himself publicly on the side of the Allies, made some financial contributions. in answer to the appeal for funds and encouraged those who sought his advice to enter the army or share in the war effort. Inwardly, he put his spiritual force

behind the Allies from the moment of Dunkirk when everybody was expecting the immediate fall of England and the definite triumph of Hitler, and he had the satisfaction of seeing the rush of German victory almost immediately arrested and the tide of war begin to turn in the opposite direction. This he did, because he saw that behind Hitler and Nazism were dark Asuric forces and that their success would mean the enslavement of mankind to the tyranny of evil, and a set-back to the course of evolution and especially to the spiritual evolution of mankind: it would lead also to the enslavement not only of Europe but of Asia, and in it of India, an enslavement far more terrible than any this country had ever endured, and the undoing of all the work that had been done for her liberation. It was this reason also that induced him to support publicly the Cripps' offer and to press the Congress leaders to accept it. He had not, for various reasons, intervened with his spiritual force against the Japanese aggression until it became evident that Japan intended to attack and even invade and conquer India. He allowed certain letters he had written in support of the war affirming his views of the Asuric nature and inevitable outcome of Hitlerism to become public. He supported the Cripps' offer because by its acceptance India and Britain

could stand united against the Asuric forces and the solution of Cripps could be used as a step towards independence. When negotiations failed, Sri Aurobindo returned to his reliance on the use of spiritual force alone against the aggressor and had the satisfaction of seeing the tide of Japanese victory, which had till then swept everything before it, change immediately into a tide of rapid, crushing and finally immense and overwhelming defeat. He had also after a time the satisfaction of seeing his previsions about the future of India justify themselves so that she stands independent with whatever internal difficulties.

(Sri Aurobindo was now in Calcutta and he was in his element. He had given up his Baroda job, its settled salary and seductive prospects without any hesitation.)

Sri Aurobindo was present at the Congress in 1904 and again in 1906 and took a part in the counsels of the Extremist Party and in the formation of its fourfold programme—"Swaraj, Swadeshi, Boycott, National Education"—which the Moderate leaders after a severe tussle behind the scenes were obliged to incorporate in the resolutions of 1906. Bipin Pal had just started a daily paper *Bande Mataram*

with only 500 rupees in his pocket. Sri Aurobindo took up the joint editorship of the Journal, edited the paper during Bepin Pal's absence and induced the Nationalist Party to take it up as their organ and finance it. He called a meeting of the party leaders at which it was decided at his instance to give up the behind-the-scenes jostlings with the Moderates, and declare an open war on Moderatism and place before the country what was practically a revolutionary propaganda. He gave up his Baroda job some time after this; he had taken indefinite leave without pay; for this reason he did not take up officially and publicly the editorship of the *Bande Mataram* although after Bepin Pal left that post, he was practically in full control of the policy of the paper.

(The Bengal National College was founded and Sri Aurobindo became its Principal. But owing to differences with the College authorities he resigned his position.)

At an early period he left the organisation of the College to the educationist Satish Mukherjee and plunged fully into politics. When the *Bande Mataram* case was brought against him he resigned his post in order not to embarrass the College

authorities but resumed it again on his acquittal. During the Alipur case he resigned finally at the request of the College authorities.

(After resigning from the Bengal National College Sri Aurobindo was free to associate himself actively with the Nationalist Party and its organ "Bande Mataram".)

It was done long before that as the above account will show.

(Sri Aurobindo's political policy in "Bande Mataram" articles.)

(1)

As a politician it was part of Sri Aurobindo's principles never to appeal to the British people; that he would have considered as part of the mendicant policy. These articles and other items (satiric verse, parodies, etc.) in *Bande Mataram* referred to in these pages (not of course *Vidula* and *Perseus*) were the work of Shyam Sundar Chakravarti, not of Sri Aurobindo. Shyam Sundar was a witty parodist and could write with much humour as also with a telling rhetoric; he had caught up some imitation of

Sri Aurobindo's style and many could not distinguish between their writings. In Sri Aurobindo's absence from Calcutta it was Shyam Sundar who wrote most of the *Bande Mataram* editorials, those excepted which were sent by Sri Aurobindo from Deoghar.

(2)

Sri Aurobindo never brought any rancour into his politics. He never had any hatred for England or the English people; he based his claim for freedom for India on the inherent right to freedom, not on any charge of misgovernment or oppression; if he attacked persons even violently, it was for their views or political action, not from any other motive.

(Earlier in the year 1907 he had been prosecuted in connection with his editorship of "Bande Mataram" and the series of articles he wrote in it under the heading, "The New Path".)

No—the prosecution was for a letter written by somebody to the Editor and for the publication of articles included in the *Jugantar* case but not actually used by the prosecution. The *Bande Mataram* was never prosecuted for its editorial articles. The editor of *The Statesman* complained that they were

too diabolically clever, crammed full of sedition between the lines, but legally unattackable because of the skill of the language. The Government must have shared this view, for they never ventured to attack the paper for its editorial or other articles, whether Sri Aurobindo's or from the pen of his three editorial colleagues. There is also the fact that Sri Aurobindo never based his case for freedom on racial hatred or charges of tyranny or misgovernment, but always on the inalienable right of the nation to independence. His stand was that even good government could not take the place of national government—independence.

(The prosecution had failed and he was acquitted, but it had succeeded, if anything, only in putting him to the forefront and making the Indian intelligentsia only more than ever eager to read the "Bande Mataram".)

Sri Aurobindo had confined himself to writing and leadership behind the scenes, not caring to advertise himself or put forward his personality, but the imprisonment and exile of other leaders and the publicity given to his name by the case compelled him to come forward and take the lead on the public platform.

पुस्तक

(From 1904 an extremist section had been formed in the Congress and its members were waiting for the Congress to meet at Bombay to make themselves felt.)

It is not clear to what this refers. In 1904 the Extremist Party had not been publicly formed, although there was an advanced section in the Congress, strong in Maharashtra but still small and weak elsewhere and composed mostly of young men; there were sometimes disputes behind the scenes but nothing came out in public. These men of extremer views were not even an organised group; it was Sri Aurobindo who in 1906 persuaded this group in Bengal to take public position as a party, proclaim Tilak as their leader and enter into a contest with the Moderate leaders for the control of the Congress and of public opinion and action in the country. The first great public clash between the two parties took place in the sessions of the Congress at Calcutta where Sri Aurobindo was present but still working behind the scenes, the second at the Bengal Provincial Conference at Midnapore where he for the first time acted publicly as the leader of the Bengal Nationalists, and the final break took place at Surat in 1907.

